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re: Raised Bill # 5553 "An Act Concerning Substance Abuse Programs"

Good morning Sen Coleman, Rep. Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee, My name is Paul Waters and I represent The Commonwealth Group of Manchester, CT. I am here today to speak in favor of HB 5553, An Act Concerning Substance Abuse Programs.

My testimony wholeheartedly endorses the Bill that is before you. I would like to particularly speak to the issues of Sections 3 and 4 of the Bill. As you well know, Sec. 3 will once again require a drunken driving offender with one or more convictions under 14-227a or 14-227b of the general statutes, to participate in and successfully complete a multiple offender drunken driving program, designed specifically to address this population, while being at no cost to the State. Sec. 4 speaks to the immediate reinstatement of the multiple offender drunken driving program, also known as 14-227f of the general statutes, which was repealed as of 12/31/2011. Both sections show your immediate concern for the public safety at large and we thank you for this.

My agency has been providing 14-227f (the Department of Motor Vehicles multiple offender drunken driving program) since its inception in 1995. Over the past sixteen (16) years we have worked with more than twenty thousand (20,000) multiple drunken driving offenders, and as of December 2008, the last time we were furnished statistics by the DMV, our recidivism rate was approximately seven percent (7%). I feel very comfortable stating that the other agencies that have also provided the program, CT Renaissance of Bridgeport and MCCA of Danbury, have had equal success. The bottom line to this is, what we have been providing, has been working.

With the repeal of 14-227f, the State is left with no multiple offender drunken driving program whatsoever.

This makes no sense at all given the legislatures' attempt to strengthen DWI laws through the passage of the Ignition Interlock Device law, that went into effect on Jan. 1, 2012. We agree with the IID law, however clinical literature clearly states that without a complimentary and concurrent program designed specifically to assess, intervene, educate and treat this population of multiple drunken driving offenders, once the device is removed, recidivism rates again soar upward. The literature also shows empirical evidence that programs specifically designed for the multiple offender and offered concurrently with the IID, are clearly having a positive effect on the recidivism rate and that these individuals are making positive lifestyle changes.

With the repeal of 14-227f, there remains approximately twenty one thousand (21,000) multiple offenders who never responded to the DMV notification that they must complete the program prior to having their driving privileges restored. That disturbing number came directly from Commissioner Melody Currey.

What this means, and what was confirmed by Commissioner Currey, is that as a result of the repeal of the program, the 21,000 non-respondents were to be given a "pardon" upon completing their revocation time. In other words for the price of \$175, the restoration fee, these 21,000 multiple offenders, are going to be back on our streets and highways without fulfilling their original obligation to the State. They will once again be driving without any assessment of risk and need, without any treatment, without any form of education or peer intervention. This is unconscionable, yet it is NOW happening.

At a meeting I attended on January 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2012, at the CT MADD headquarters, Executive Director Janice Hegge-Margolis was informed of this repeal and of the 21,000 potential "pardons": her response in part was, "twenty one thousand potential killers".

We just cannot let twenty one thousand (21,000) potential killers get behind the wheel of a vehicle without the State's knowledge of their current behavioral health and mental health stability and if

they are capable of being responsible drivers. *The best indicator of future behavior is past behavior*: with this in mind, we must be allowed to once again address these people through a proven program, 14-227f.

Today we have no idea of what their conditions may be: most likely they are deeper into the throws of their alcohol abuse: perhaps now including hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin as well as their alcohol; maybe mixing alcohol and prescription pills. We have no idea. Yet these are the chronic alcohol abusers who have already shown a propensity to bad judgment, i.e., multiple drunken driving arrests, who are now getting a "pardon" as a result of this repeal.

So how did this happen? No one seems to know, yet there is plenty of finger pointing. What's really important is that the program, 14-227f, be restored as soon as possible to avoid catastrophic results and that a "new" multiple offender drunken driving program be mandated for all those offenders now convicted under the IID laws of 1/1/2012.

It must be emphasized that this program, 14-227f, has cost the State virtually nothing: it is totally client funded. There has not been any State funds whatsoever over all these years, used to pay for an offender's participation. This is a program that should be heralded, not repealed. Yet for some unknown reason, and without any discussion whatsoever with the providers, it was repealed. Please restore 14-227f as soon as you are able.

We believe that the program should be restored and the CT based providers, The Commonwealth Group of Manchester, whom I represent, CT Renaissance and MCCA, should have their State contracts, which were voided months in advance of their expirations due to the repeal, renewed forthwith. We strongly suggest that a window for program participation be established: from passage of the Bill to Dec. 31, 2014. This will allow for approximately a two and one half year window to address the 21,000 non-respondents. After that date, an extension of another six (6) months for all participants to finish and be phased out of the program. In other words, by June 30, 2015, 14-227f should have served its purpose. The hope here is that by virtue of Sec. 3 of this Bill a similar Multiple Offender Program will be in place to respond to those convicted under the new law of Jan. 1, 2012, which includes the IID.

In conclusion, I would like to mention a couple of other issues that have hit my agency particularly hard: first is that The Commonwealth Group's only business purpose is to provide a multiple offender program. We do not provide other clinical modalities or programs. As a result of the repeal, we have had to lay off twenty-two (22) full and part-time employees, most of whom are now collecting unemployment benefits. I know it's been hard on them and their families. In addition, despite our contract being unceremoniously voided, we have continued to hold up our end of the agreement and continue to provide services and phase out our clients, so that they can get their driving privileges restored as was originally ordered. We do so despite having no income whatsoever. My point being, that we take our responsibility very seriously and the services we have provided over the years could stand muster with any program of similar nature from coast to coast.

Members of the Committee, I thank you for your generous time and I implore you to please strongly consider Sec. 3 and Sec. 4 of HB 5553.

Respectively submitted,

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